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G. A. Oxon 8° 43'







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# A DREAM

OF THE

## NEW MUSEUM.

13

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"Mutato nomine, de te  
Fabula narratur."

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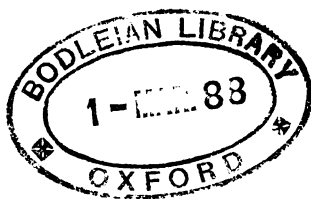
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## A DREAM OF THE NEW MUSEUM.

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I WAS sitting the other day in my easy chair, ruminating over the prospects of our New Museum, and meditating upon the various obstacles that had stood in its way during the long period of thirty years which had elapsed since the project was first mooted.

My memory reverted to those early days, when the deficiencies of Oxford, so far as regarded the means of studying Nature, were first pointed out, and proposed to be met by the aid of a private subscription, originating with a few earnest friends of Physical Science. I thence proceeded to dwell upon the objections which at first were pronounced to be fatal to such a scheme, but which by degrees had been so far overruled, that the design, which was at first entertained merely as a private undertaking, came at length to be adopted by the University, and to be considered deserving the appropriation to it of a large portion of our public funds.

In the midst of these lucubrations I fell into that dreamy state, in which the external senses become unconscious of surrounding objects, although the mind retains a confused impression of the images which had last floated before it; and in this mood fancied myself transported to some foreign city, which although it presented certain features in common with Oxford, did not seem to possess that mediæval character,



or those time-worn, and time-honored buildings which I was familiar with in my own University.

Although I could perceive no signs of trade or manufactures on the one hand, nor any particular splendor in the private mansions on the other, the town had by no means a decayed or poverty-stricken appearance, reminding me rather of Berlin without its palaces, or of Bath unembellished with its glittering shops, and tempting displays of bonnets and millinery.

Puzzled to know what could have befallen me, and what place I could have stumbled upon, I applied for information to an elderly gentleman standing near, whose bland and courteous demeanor encouraged me to address him, and whose intelligent air led me to anticipate from him a satisfactory solution of my difficulties.

I presume sir, he replied, you come from a far country, or I should not need to inform you that you are in the centre of the celebrated University of Icaria, where not only all the Physical Sciences, but the entire circle of Natural Knowledge is cultivated with such success, as to have won the admiration of all Germany. You see in your humble servant one of the most unworthy, although one of the oldest of her sons.

Let me then, said I eagerly, claim you as a colleague and a brother, for I too belong like yourself to a place of learning, not less celebrated I trust than your own, I mean the ancient University of Oxford.

I confess, replied my companion, from all I have heard of Oxford, there do not appear to be many points of resemblance between our University and yours, but in one respect I flatter myself we agree,—I mean in our courtesy to strangers, and our disposition to assist them in their inquiries; and as you are doubtless come here for the purpose of lionising our city, you may freely command my services as a Cicerone.

Perceiving my countenance lighted up at this kind proposal, let us, he continued, proceed without further ado along the handsome street of the Ologies in which we now stand, and turning up Physic Lane, enter the grand Square, in the midst

of which is erected our magnificent University Building, the glory of our age and nation.

Accordingly under the guidance of my conductor, I soon found myself in front of an imposing edifice, which almost bewildered me with the number and magnitude of its courts and quadrangles, and with the endless variety of its external embellishments, all of the newest taste and in the freshest condition. Nor was I less astounded, when on being admitted into the interior, I surveyed the contents of the vast halls and galleries through which I was taken in succession; some of them filled with Philosophical Instruments of the most elaborate workmanship; others devoted to Chemical experiments, in which a throng of youths were eagerly prosecuting the manipulations of that interesting Science; others set apart for demonstrations on human and comparative anatomy, or for the preparation of specimens of Natural History sent there for examination.

But above all I was transported at the sight of the Museum, in which were collected the animal and vegetable productions of every region under the sun,—an assemblage of the whole series of organised beings that had existed upon the earth since the first dawn of creation—whatever in short human industry had from time to time brought to light as illustrative of the past as well as the present history of our globe.

Here, said my friend, you will see realised the dream of your illustrious Lord Bacon in his picture of the fabulous Atlantis—for nowhere else will you find so complete an embodiment, as in this Temple of Science, of the idea of his Solomon's House, and of the treasures it contained. Within this great receptacle indeed are displayed all the links of the great chain of creation in their minutest details—and, moreover, whatever man, availing himself of the faculties with which God has endowed him, and taking advantage of the properties of that brute matter which was created for his use, has invented to minister to his material wants, and to improve his own physical condition.

There is nevertheless one thing, I remarked, which you

have neglected to shew me—I mean your public Library, for doubtless an Institution like this, which, by assuming the comprehensive name of an University, professes to embrace the whole cycle of human knowledge, cannot but possess one commensurate to the other means and appliances for the acquisition of knowledge which I see so bountifully provided—a Library in short, which shall rival our Bodleian in point of extent, and our Radcliffe in architectural beauty.

I thank you, said my friend, for reminding me of an omission; our Library indeed is a nice little place enough, and in its present state does great credit to its excellent Curator—but you shall judge for yourself.

So saying, he took me into a room of small dimensions, compared with those I had before visited, the contents of which were neatly arranged and judiciously disposed, but consisted, except in the department of Natural History and Science, of elementary works chiefly.

Perceiving in my countenance the disappointment which I really felt on seeing so inadequate a supply of materials for profound study—do not imagine, he said, that these are all the volumes we possess, for although it may be true that the University is not fond of spending its funds upon such objects, we are continually receiving presents of books from various quarters, and have in consequence hired a number of lumber-rooms in different parts of the town, where they are thrown together into boxes, to be consulted by the few who will take the trouble to turn them over, and hunt out what they require.

It is true this is attended with some inconveniences; an Aristophanes may thus be found in one place, and a Greek Lexicon in another; or the commentary upon a Classic may lay a mile off from the repository to which the text is consigned; but still the treasures are there, and in spite of difficulties there are now and then found resolute spirits who succeed in disinterring them.

However, added he, perceiving that I did not look quite satisfied with this explanation, you will not find in me a

person willing to go all lengths in vindicating our Academical usages, and I am proud to assure you, that I am one of those who have laboured for a long time to get this deficiency supplied.

Being, as you perceive, an elderly person, I can go back to a period of thirty years of academical life, and even at that distance of time remember the efforts made by myself and a few others to awaken the University from their apathy on this subject, and to get them to provide a fit receptacle for the many literary treasures which they possessed.

As at the time I speak of, no public funds were known to be available for such a purpose, we did what we could to raise the necessary means by private subscriptions, but alas! without success.

Few of our own body, indeed, cared enough about books to make any considerable personal sacrifice to house them properly; and the public were hardly likely to assist very largely an University, which from the splendour of its other Establishments appeared to them to possess such ample funds at its disposal. Indeed, we might to this hour have failed in our efforts to get a new Library erected, had it not been for two circumstances which happened about the same time to favour our scheme; but I fear you are tired with this long detail of *parish business*.

Far from it, I replied. On the contrary, you have awakened my curiosity; and moreover what you have already said is rather consolatory to us Oxonians, as proving that an indifference to those studies which we do not ourselves cultivate is not peculiarly the besetting sin of book-worms and scholars.

The first cause, then, proceeded he, which tended to favour the project of a Library, was a change recently brought about in our academical system, the effect of which, it was thought, would be to create a greater demand for works on literary subjects. It seems, a complaint had been made in the country at large, that the education at Icaria was too exclusively scientific; and this outcry was not merely a radical one, which might have been despised and

resisted, but proceeded also from the rich and noble of the land, nay even from the Government itself. The objectors were no longer, as of old, to be crushed with the hackneyed argument, that the greatest statesmen, lawyers, and divines of whom the country had to boast, were educated under the existing system—that one of our Bishops, for instance, had in his youth been a great Mycologist—that the profoundest of our constitutional Lawyers had come into early repute by his Prize Essay on the Constitution of the Atmosphere—and that one of the Orators who had most distinguished himself in denouncing the revolutionary tendencies of the age, had profoundly studied whilst at the University the Revolutions of the Globe.

The reforming party now took courage to reply, that this could hardly happen otherwise, so long as the professions were filled exclusively by persons educated at the University, and the *Ologies* continued there the only things insisted upon.

Nay, one of the boldest of the Classical Coterie was heard to declare, that not being, like the author of the *Vestiges*, a believer in the common origin of Man and Brutes, he doubted whether the study of Zoology was the best means of acquiring a knowledge of human nature, or whether the exact discrimination of microscopic animalcules was of much real service in initiating us into the profounder mysteries of our moral and social condition.

Perhaps, however, interrupted I, our own University might be quoted in support of the opposite opinion, for even if the structure of these minute and insignificant beings be regarded, as they are by the vulgar, the freaks of nature in her playful mood—the mere outpourings of her exuberant vitality—such *Lusus Naturæ* deserve at least to be treated with more respect than the playful effusions of the human intellect, those *prolusiones Academicæ*, which occupy so much of the attention of our English scholars—the mysteries of Greek metres—or other such laborious trifling.

Each of these pursuits, replied my friend, in its proper place appears to me good and respectable, for I am not so

much of an Utilitarian as to grudge the time and expense lavished upon the ornaments of a building, provided it be itself sound and serviceable; or to find fault with those who are so enamoured of a line of study, as to think more of the pleasure of the chase, than of the value of the object they pursue.

But let us at least be consistent, and whilst we concede all due honour to that exact Scholarship which solaces itself in the above harmless recreations, let us not apply too strictly the *cui bono* test to those minute researches in Natural History to which we are prompted here by the genius of the place.

I must now, however, resume my narrative, and inform you that such was the pressure from without in favour of an extension of our studies beyond the range of the *Ologies*, that some change was felt to be necessary; and even our Rector Magnificus, who you must know is the first of living Algologists, and whose hatred of the Classics had become quite rabid since a learned friend informed him that the Latin Poets have the impertinence to apply the epithets of *vile* and *useless* to the Class of Plants on which he had expended forty years of unremitting labour—even he, I say, was obliged to give way; so that at length by a sort of compromise not unusual when political parties are pretty equally balanced, it was agreed, that whilst the emoluments of the University (with the exception of two obsolete and ill-paid Chairs of Greek and Latin,) were to be appropriated as before to Naturalists and Men of Science, its honours might in future be shared in some degree by the votaries of Classical Literature.

Excuse me, said I, for interrupting again your narrative, but I am impatient to know what effect this Statute has had in encouraging a taste for these hitherto almost ignored subjects. I cannot but believe, that there is a beauty in these masterpieces of antiquity, now it seems for the first time unveiled to you, which requires only to be seen in order to be admired.

What romance can be more spirit-stirring than “The Tale of Troy divine,” as sung to us by the Father of Greek Minstrelsy—what comedy can surpass the racy humour or the

vigorous poetry of the Clouds of Aristophanes—what stories of modern invention would captivate the youthful fancy more than the early legends of Greece and Rome, as they are handed down to us by Herodotus and Livy? And then the Greek Language itself, so copious, so flexible, so melodious, so capable of moulding itself to the expression of every phase of human thought, every lineament of external nature. In the Georgics, too, what sonorous, what majestic periods!

Stop, good friend, interrupted my Cicerone, I am not going to dispute the merits of your favourite Classics; but before you infer from thence, that they must necessarily win their way in an University constituted like ours, pray recollect, that the Book of Nature, which, I fear, notwithstanding certain recent changes which have been reported to me as having taken place at Oxford, is as yet but little read by your Students, abounds in passages not less eloquent and touching; not less calculated to interest the imagination, or to inform the judgment. The fact is, that to most persons study of any kind is rather a means than an end, and as it so happens, that with us Physical Science not only engrosses all the substantial emoluments of the University, but is also the only passport to those professions which in after life are the main sources of honour and emolument, it secures to itself the exclusive attention of the great majority of our Collegians.

You may not perhaps know, that by an ancient law every district in the country is obliged to maintain a Physician, who, besides being instructed in the principles of the art which he is to practise, must also have gone through the University, and so have passed a pretty searching examination in all the *Ologies*.

It is nearly the same in the other professions, and so long as this rule continues, I leave you to judge whether the dead languages can expect to hold more than a very subordinate place at Icaria.

Nevertheless the mere recognition of Classical Literature amongst the elements of academical education naturally created a certain demand for books on these subjects, and it

therefore began to be felt more requisite than heretofore to provide a place, where those at least we already possessed might be conveniently consulted.

There was also another circumstance about this time which contributed much towards the success of our scheme. You must know that Government, in order to provide the University with the funds requisite for maintaining its existing Establishments, secured to it some years back a monopoly of all the steam engines in the kingdom, and of late years, since locomotives have come into such general use, the revenue derived from this source has actually become considerable.

Now our Institutions for the encouragement of Physical Science are, as you have seen, of the completest kind. The Museum is really such as leaves nothing to be desired; by means of the philosophical instruments of all descriptions we possess, our Students are enabled to pursue any line of physical research, on which they may desire to enter; and even the Professor of Botany, although already possessed of a Palm-house which equals in dimensions what I have read of the one belonging to your Royal Establishment at Kew, had lately obtained a new grant for the purpose of erecting a Stove for Tropical Fruits, in order that he may be enabled to present a plate of ripe Mangosteens at the annual Academic Banquet, given by their High Mightinesses, the Rector Magnificus, and the Professors who compose our Senate.

Seeing therefore that the public money was not likely to be required for any of the recognised purposes of our Institution, we had the boldness to apply for a portion of it, in order to erect a Building, in which the Collections of Books presented to us by various private hands might be arranged in due order and connexion; and in which, moreover, the Greek and Latin Professors might impart their instructions with somewhat greater comfort and respectability than heretofore.

Our first petition was for a grant of money large enough to insure to our Fabric a style of Architecture, sufficiently grand



and imposing, to have placed it in some degree on a par with the other Public Edifices of this magnificent University.

But this was indignantly rejected as a piece of impertinence and extravagance.

It would, our opponents said, be nothing less than to elevate the works of man to a level with those of God, if we were to raise a Building to contain the mere lucubrations of man's puny intellect, the records of his errors, his crimes and his vagaries, of the same character and grandeur, as that glorious Museum, in which are spread out before us the pages of the Volume, which had been written by the immediate finger of the great Author of Nature himself.

The Library Committee were accordingly forced to fall back upon a more unpretending and less expensive plan, which should provide, indeed, the requisite accommodation for the Books and Lectures, but which was shorn of much of its intended architectural splendor.

But here they were at first met by a cry of an opposite kind. The Building, it was said by the objectors, is unworthy of the University, it is shabby, tasteless, and unsightly.

One would have had it Palladian; a second Grecian; a third, Byzantine.

As if, interrupted I, a hungry man would send away his dinner, because it was served up on a pewter instead of a silver plate; or would leave the table with a fasting stomach, because the dishes were not disposed in a perfectly symmetrical order.

Your parallel, replied my interlocutor, is not quite exact, for unfortunately the great body of our Students do not at present evince a very eager craving for the viands we wish to set before them. Indeed, I should rather apply to this subject a remark, which has, I think, been sometimes made of religious and moral instruction—namely, that those require it most, who desire it least. At any rate, if it can be shewn, that some portions of our intellectual frame are stunted and curtailed through the want of appropriate nourishment, it is our duty, methinks, in an University, to provide it. *L'Appetit*, the French say, *vient en mangant*.

But to return.—Another objection started to the appropriation of our funds to such purposes, was one, which, I think, you would hardly anticipate. It was argued, that as the funds were derived from the sale of locomotives, to locomotive purposes alone they ought to be applied; and it being admitted that the University was already in possession of models of all the steam engines that were ever invented or thought of, and, indeed, of every machine which had the slightest relation to the subject, the money ought to be spent upon the general improvement of locomotives, or at least of Mechanical Science in general, throughout the country.

This, said I, seems absurd and unreasonable, for it is but fair, that one secular pursuit should help on another, and that the Physical Sciences should assist in supporting their drooping Classical Sister—if, indeed, the Funds had been derived from sacred sources :

Begging your pardon, said my companion, I do not think this makes the slightest difference. Without instituting any comparison between the relative importance of secular and spiritual objects, I may remind you that the question here is not the *source* of the funds, but the *intention* of the person that supplied them.

The spiritual destitution, for instance, of the country in general is no doubt a greater evil, than the inconvenience to which this town would be put by being deprived of gas-lights and pavements; and yet you would complain of your Overseer, if he were to apply to the Church Building Fund the money he had collected for *the benefit of this particular parish* under the Paving and Lighting Act; nay, you would hardly excuse him, even if he were to allege, that the sum he contributed had been derived from a legacy left for parish purposes, by a bookseller, who had got his money by the sale of Bibles.

Why, certainly, I remarked, if it were allowable to divert money contributed for a specific purpose, to other objects, because they were more important, our Press money in Oxford might fairly be seized upon by Government for our army in the Crimea.

It is not worth while, resumed my friend, to notice further an objection, which if it were ever seriously entertained, seems at length tacitly abandoned; and I will now wind up this long account of our Library question, by informing you, that after much discussion and sundry delays, the foundation stone of the new Building was laid on Thursday last.

During the latter part of this conversation, I had observed a gentleman, who wore the same academic costume as my worthy conductor, gradually sidling up to us, and listening to our conversation, with apparent interest, but not with an air of perfect satisfaction.

When, however, these last words had been uttered, the stranger could no longer contain himself, but making up to my friend in a very excited manner, he exclaimed, "And so you have got at last your Babylon of a Library, for a Babylon, indeed, it will be, when it is furnished, as you propose, with books of all languages, dead as well as living—enough, indeed, to breed a confusion of tongues, and to stun us with a jargon of outlandish dialects.

"You stole a march upon us, indeed, this time, by your *adroitness* in procuring a Contract below the Estimate; for I, at least, had voted for the plan before, in the hopes of giving the *coup de grace* to your absurd project, never dreaming it would be undertaken for the money voted.

"But I will be even with you next time, for though the Library is to be built, I will do my best to make it as useless as possible; and when it is done, and you come to us to get it fitted up, and maintained at the public cost, depend upon it, you shall get not a sixpence, if I can prevent it, either for shelves to put the Books upon, or for a housemaid to dust them."

The excitement under which the poor man laboured so startled me, that I suddenly awoke, and found myself—in Oxford.















